



PHILIP ANGELIDES
Treasurer
State of California

July 12, 2006

Honorable Diane E. Watson
Congressmember
U.S. House of Representatives
125 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Watson:

With deep conviction that the right to vote is the foundation of our democracy and fundamental to the survival of the United States as a free nation, I urge your support of H.R.9 – without any amendments – to extend the 1965 federal Voting Rights act for 25 years. The Voting Rights Act is one of the most significant laws ever enacted by our nation

Passage of H.R. 9 – the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Park and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization – will ensure the renewal of critical protections that are at the core of eliminating barriers to full participation by all Americans in the political process. In March of this year, as California State Treasurer, I supported California Assembly Joint Resolution 37 requesting the President and Congress to extend key provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act. I applaud the California Legislature for adopting this resolution.

In my letter of support for AJR 37 I told legislators that it is incomprehensible that anyone would question the effectiveness and relevance of any provision of the Voting Rights Act. From its inception, the impact of this Act has been dramatic as evidenced by the increase in voter registration by those groups most affected by efforts to weaken participation in the electoral process.

It is now up to Congress to act. For a state with a population as diverse as California's, preservation of the voting rights act – especially its provisions to prevent voter discrimination based on race or language proficiency – is vital to ensure fair elections and full participation of all eligible voters. More than 300 languages other than English are spoken in California. Many of these people need language assistance to cast informed ballots. Section 203 of the act, which covers 28 of California's 58 counties, ensures that voter language assistance in those counties is available in Spanish, and seven of those counties are required to provide assistance in at least one Asian language. In all, nearly 1.5 million Californians benefit from this protection.

Section 5 of the Act, which requires regions of the country with persistent histories of discrimination to have their election plans approved by the U.S. Department of Justice, also continues to be an important protection for portions of California. It ensures that all significant communities of interest in the state have the opportunity to cast votes that truly count.

I would like to believe that the Voting Rights Act had achieved its purpose and was no longer necessary. But the reality is that far too many voters and communities of interest in California and in the nation remain vulnerable to discriminatory practices. The Act protections are as relevant and significant today as they were in 1965. I believe that passage of H.R. 9 without any amendments is critical to the preservation of political participation and enfranchisement for all the voters of California and the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip Angelides".

Phil Angelides